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ABSTRACT

Prepared for the White House Conference on Children (December 1970), this booklet reports on the Martin Luther King Family Center, one of 34 promising programs on childhood education. The Martin Luther King Family Center is now a privately funded, community-controlled demonstration service center with an all black staff. All of its programs are designed to strengthen the participant's identity and encourage him in an active relationship with his environment. The Center is actively responsive to community desires. The community involved is located in a public housing project and has been described as the poorest in Chicago. Some of the many programs of the Center are: (1) a preschool program, concerned with developing feelings of competence and learning in children and their mothers; (2) a free health center for medical and dental care; (3) a Toddler's Lab, which serves as an experimental group of very young children; and, (4) a chartered community group, which plans community projects, such as a local community-controlled supermarket and credit union. For other booklets in the series, see UD 011 120-121, and CG 123-125. (Author/JW)

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Model Programs

Childhood Education

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Martin Luther King Family Center

Chicago, Illinois

A community-controlled agency offering educational, psychological, and cultural services to the black community

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
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FOREWORD

This booklet is one of 34 in a series of promising programs on childhood education prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. The series was written under contract by the American Institutes for Research for the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Child Development and the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Within the broad area of childhood education the series includes descriptions of programs on reading and language development, the disadvantaged, preschool education, and special education. In describing a program, each booklet provides details about the purpose; the children reached; specific materials, facilities, and staff involved; and other special features such as community services, parental involvement, and finances. Sources of further information on the programs are also provided.

The Martin Luther King Family Center began in 1965 as a research component of the Institute for Juvenile Research in Chicago, supported with private, State, and Federal funds. The Center is now a privately funded, community-controlled demonstration service center with an all black staff. All its programs are designed to strengthen the participant's identity and encourage him in an active relationship with his environment. The staff offers help to any community member in need without creating a sense of inadequacy or a loss of dignity. The Center provides community members with a positive experience in leadership, since it is responsive to community desires and community members on the board of directors are actively engaged in policy making and fund raising.

THE MILE SQUARE COMMUNITY

The Center is located in four apartments of a public housing project located in the Mile Square area. Fifteen thousand people, all black, live in the six blocks around the Center. The community has been described by a local welfare agency as the poorest in Chicago; many of the stores in the community have been gutted in riots and stand empty. Although the few stores in operation charge high prices for their goods, most residents do not leave

the neighborhood to shop. There are no banks in the area, and check-cashing businesses in the community charge fees of about 6 percent on the amount of a check cashed. Services are impossible to obtain in the community--stores refuse to deliver to the area and telephone workmen will not make repairs there.

About 50 percent of the residents have high school diplomas, and most of the families are stable. Residence and rent in the housing project depend upon the size and income of the family. Families who manage to increase their income or save a certain amount of money must pay higher rents, and in some cases are required to leave the housing project altogether. The community is very volatile; riots and gun battles with the police have occurred in and around the housing project.

PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

The Center's programs for toddlers and preschool-age children are concerned with developing feelings of competence and learning in children and their mothers. The programs are based on the belief that learning is a function of the child's orientation to his environment, and that the child develops this orientation in response to his mother's view of her relationship to the world

around her. Thus, a mother who sees the world as hostile and herself as powerless discourages her child from exploring his environment and communicates her fear and passivity to him. A confident mother who believes she can interact effectively with her environment contributes to her child's development by approving his active testing of his world. The Center's programs encourage children to feel safe and free to explore and challenge and, at the same time, attempt to give parents a more positive self-concept, a feeling of effectiveness and mastery.

The children's environment at the Center is thus designed to be secure as well as stimulating, so that children may overcome their fears. Each teacher cares for a small group of about seven children to enable them to establish a secure relationship with their group and teacher. Every group has its own area of the classroom, set off from other groups by shelves and cabinets. The class has a fixed routine. The knowledge the children bring to the classroom is reinforced, and teachers work to expand their knowledge and experience through structured play activities without using force or threats. Children are encouraged to see themselves as effective black individuals who can have an impact on events in their world.

The programs are intended to build on the competence the children possess rather than to point up their weaknesses. Four-year-olds in this community are capable of performing complex tasks such as going to the store for their mothers and returning with the desired item and correct change, finding their way around the halls, using elevators in a large housing project, and babysitting for younger brothers and sisters. The Center staff believes that these children show organizational abilities and resourcefulness which should be recognized and encouraged.

Individual progress records are kept on each child, as he works at his own speed. Each record includes the child's social, cognitive, and motor skills as they were observed when he entered the program. Teachers record progress in these areas as new skills are acquired.

The children speak a community dialect, and their speech is not criticized or corrected. Instead, the teacher says to the child, "Another way to say that is . . . ." or "The school way to say that is . . . ." and repeats the child's sentence in standard English.

Before a child is enrolled in a program, a social worker visits his parents, discussing with them the services available at the Center, and a teacher visits the home to become acquainted with the child. While the child is participating in the program, his parents are invited to visit the Center frequently for meetings and discussions with the staff, and most parents also become involved in adult programs at the Center. In addition, the parents, teacher, and social worker meet at least three times a year to discuss the child. The teacher and social worker share with the parents what they have learned about the child--how he has progressed, his problems, and how well he can be expected to perform in school. Parents are encouraged to reinforce their children when they are doing well and to support them in their learning and exploration.

The children take carefully planned field trips to such places as the beach, a farm, the zoo, the aquarium, a library, or local parks. On longer trips, the entire family is invited to accompany the children and staff members, and buses are chartered from a local company.

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The Mile Square Health Center, funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity and connected with a private hospital in Chicago, provides free medical and dental care to Mile Square residents. The children participating in the Center's preschool programs are given physical examinations at the clinic before they attend the Center. The Center staff takes the 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds to the dental clinic, where they are taught dental hygiene and examined. Any problems revealed by the examination are discussed with the child's mother. In an emergency, staff members take a child directly to the clinic for treatment instead of contacting the mother. The director of the health center participates in teaching a child development course offered at the King Family Center.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL LABORATORY FOR TODDLERS

The Toddlers' Lab serves 15 children ranging in age from 18 months to 3 years, the children coming 4 times a week for about 2 1/2 hours in the morning. The schedule of the Lab is flexible, allowing parents to bring their children when it is most convenient. The toddlers, arriving between 9 and 9:30 a.m., can participate in free play activities with large toys. At 9:30 small toy activities begin for all the children. They participate in typical nursery school activities such as singing, listening to

stories, playing with manipulative toys, and taking walks, and are served a small snack. The children leave the Center between 11:30 a.m. and noon.

The toddlers are taught by a student teacher, who is working toward a master's degree, and a teacher aide, who is a community member working toward a bachelor's degree. Each mother is required to act as a teacher in the lab once every 2 weeks, with the exception of working mothers who come when they can. Mothers are encouraged to formulate ideas about how their children learn from toys and from interacting with other children and adults.

PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

The 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds are divided into two groups of 22 children. The groups are heterogeneous, and activities are planned to appeal to all the age groups involved. These children come to the Center five mornings a week, where they engage in structured activities which teach color, number, and spatial relationships, and encourage verbal expression. Each classroom is staffed by a head teacher with a master's degree, a teacher with a bachelor's degree, and an aide who is working toward a bachelor's

degree. The 5-year-olds spend part of the morning in a special kindergarten class which focuses on cognitive development and reading and number readiness.

THE NETWORK

Since the Center's programs for young children reach only a small percentage of the community's children, the staff is attempting to establish a network of trained adults to widen the area of impact. The program director teaches a course in child development at the Center for which credit is given at a local college. Many mothers of children in the Center's programs participate in this course with other community members. The program director hopes that the individuals in the course will establish day care centers in their homes or work as aides in the local elementary schools so that many more children can be reached.

Babysitting Limited, a service in the housing project where mothers can leave their children for unscheduled periods, receives loans of toys and books from the Center. The staff and children at Babysitting Limited and parents who use this service are invited to join in the Center's field trips, and two mothers who work at Babysitting Limited participate in the child development course.

Adults in the child development course are required to spend time working with young children, and since men also participate in this course, children at the Center sometimes have the opportunity to play with and learn from adult males.

Because some children have gone from the Center's programs to kindergarten in one of the local elementary schools, staff members meet at lunch with the kindergarten teachers to discuss these children and share ideas. The staff plans to expand these meetings to include first-grade teachers.

The Center is engaged in placing black children in foster homes in the community, since black children are usually difficult to place. In 1969 two children were placed in local homes, and staff members are meeting with four families in 1970 in an effort to place four more.

PROGRAMS FOR THE COMMUNITY

The Center offers legal, social, and psychological help to any community member who needs it. A person participating in one of the programs who appears to be troubled is invited to share his problems with a staff member, who tries to offer concrete help.

The Center is open all day until late in the evening, and community members often drop in to talk with staff members. Parties and "happenings" are held for adults as well as for children, and most people living in the housing project as well as many people in the surrounding area have had some contact with the Center. The Center also has a number of special adult and children's groups.

The Concerned Fathers of the Mile Square Area, a chartered community group, grew out of an effort to involve fathers in the education and development of their children. As an initial activity, these fathers held a free fun fair for all the children in the community. The group then received a $1,000 grant from a charitable group, after which they organized eight Little League softball teams for community children and obtained a franchise to sponsor an ice cream truck in the neighborhood. The Concerned Fathers eventually decided that they could best help their children by changing and improving the community, and they are now attempting to establish a local community-controlled supermarket and a community credit union. These ventures would actively involve community residents in administering and operating businesses in addition to providing the community with much-needed services. For example, the credit union would provide savings and check-cashing services and would be involved in consumer

education, particularly in the area of credit and interest rates. Individuals planning to make large purchases involving credit would be advised by someone from the credit union on contracts, payment plans, and dealers to avoid.

In conjunction with the Red Cross, the Center offers a first aid program to community adults and teenagers to help community members deal with household emergencies and injuries that occur during crises in the community. Some participants in the course are interested in establishing community first aid stations.

PBCBS--Poor Black College-Bound Students--is a group of young adults who have dropped out of high school or junior college and are interested in obtaining entrance into a university. This group is involved in negotiating college admissions and raising funds to provide scholarships for group members.

The Center has a General Educational Development program for community members who do not have high school diplomas. The program prepares participants for the GED test so that they can further their education at institutions which require a high school diploma for admission.

A creative crafts program for 6- to 8-year-old girls is designed to develop the girls' positive feelings about themselves and their competence in using creative materials, and to develop a sense of unity and sharing.

Three photography groups for preadolescent boys allow them to express themselves and order their environment in photographs as they gain competence in taking, developing, and enlarging their own pictures. These boys participate in monthly structured field trips to places outside the immediate area, which provide a wider range of experience and new subjects for their photographs.

A group of adolescent girls engage in creative activities and meetings which give them a feeling of pride and accomplishment and allow them to discuss community and personal problems with a supportive staff member.

The music arts program, cooperatively financed by the Center and the Concerned Fathers, enables a heterogeneous group of black youngsters to learn to play various musical instruments and sing in groups. Performances are given for the community, and the music groups may become self-supporting.

A drama program includes interpretation of plays, essays, and poems by black authors as well as a debate group. Community youth are involved in selecting, reading, and interpreting black literature, history, and ideas as well as in learning to formulate their own thoughts through formal debate.

A Kitchens of the World program for preteenage girls helps the girls to develop skills in the areas of food preparation and consumer education, and provides them with experience in listening, reading, and arithmetic. Food is used as a central theme to discuss different cultures, including the black American culture.

STAFF

The staff of the Center includes an executive director and a program director, both trained in social work. The programs for young children are taught by four teachers, one student teacher, and three aides, who are community members required to attend college on a part-time basis. The teachers also operate the Kitchens of the World and creative crafts programs, and one teacher coordinates the entire cultural arts program. The director of the music program is a community member who is in the GED program and will eventually attend a school of music. The photography program is run by three part-time staff members, one of whom is a

mental health worker and one an 11-year-old boy who has a year of experience in the program. The Center has a community organizer and aide who coordinate existing groups, contribute expertise to groups such as the Concerned Fathers, and help the groups raise funds.

The casework department has a director, two full-time and one part-time social workers, two social work aides, and three social work students. The Center also has a lawyer who is on call at all times and comes in once or twice a week; and two additional lawyers are available if they are needed. A psychiatrist is available for consultation with the social work staff and in training the social work students, and psychology graduate students from the University of Illinois provide psychological testing services for the children.

COSTS

The Center's annual operating costs are about $300,000, 85 percent of which is used to pay staff salaries. The Center does not use volunteers except for isolated tasks, and staff members from the community receive good salaries. The Center is entirely funded by grant foundations and private organizations; it receives no State or Federal support.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Additional information about the Center can be found in the following booklets:

Strategies in Community Control

A Freedom School for Young Black Children

Creativity Unlimited: Competence through Cultural Arts

To obtain these booklets or arrange for a visit, contact:

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MODEL PROGRAMS--Childhood Education

This is one in a series of 34 descriptive booklets on childhood education programs prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. Following is a list of the programs and their locations:

The Day Nursery Assn. of Cleveland, Ohio
Neighborhood House Child Care Services, Seattle, Wash.
Behavior Analysis Model of a Follow Through Program, Oraibi, Ariz.
Cross-Cultural Family Center, San Francisco, Calif.
NRO Migrant Child Development Center, Pasco, Wash.
Bilingual Early Childhood Program, San Antonio, Tex.
Santa Monica Children's Centers, Calif.
Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, Salt Lake City, Utah
Dubnoff School for Educational Therapy, North Hollywood, Calif.
Demonstration Nursery Center for Infants and Toddlers, Greensboro, N.C.
Responsive Environment Model of a Follow Through Program, Goldsboro, N.C.
Center for Early Development and Education, Little Rock, Ark.
DOVACK, Monticello, Fla.
Perceptual Development Center Program, Natchez, Miss.
Appalachia Preschool Education Program, Charleston, W. Va.
Foster Grandparent Program, Nashville, Tenn.
Hartford Early Childhood Program, Conn.
Philadelphia Teacher Center, Pa.
Cognitively Oriented Curriculum, Ypsilanti, Mich.
Mothers' Training Program, Urbana, Ill.
The Micro-Social Preschool Learning System, Vineland, N.J.
Project PLAN, Parkersburg, W. Va.
Interdependent Learner Model of a Follow Through Program, New York, N.Y.
San Jose Police Youth Protection Unit, Calif.
Model Observation Kindergarten, Amherst, Mass.
Boston Public Schools Learning Laboratories, Mass.
Martin Luther King Family Center, Chicago, Ill.
Behavior Principles Structural Model of a Follow Through Program, Dayton, Ohio
University of Hawaii Preschool Language Curriculum, Honolulu, Hawaii
Springfield Avenue Community School, Newark, N.J.
Corrective Reading Program, Wichita, Kans.
New Schools Exchange, Santa Barbara, Calif.
Tacoma Public Schools Early Childhood Program, Wash.
Community Cooperative Nursery School, Menlo Park, Calif.